

To members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Kyle Lavin, and I'm a police Detective in Trumbull, CT. Prior to Trumbull, I was a police officer in Stratford. I consider myself a diverse and well rounded police officer. I am a certified Field Training Officer, a hostage negotiator with the Southwest Emergency Response Team, a member of Trumbull's Community Services Unit, a member of the Hiring/Selections Unit, and a sexual assault investigator. Up until this bill was presented, I loved my job and was extremely proud to be a police officer. I loved helping people in all kinds of situations. Whether it be giving someone simple driving directions, talking to an individual in crisis, or helping a mother cope with the fact that her children were sexually assaulted by another family member. For the first time in my police career, I had a sit down conversation with my family, and talked about leaving the profession I used to love.

I have many emotions and feelings about this bill, but I want to start by presenting facts and statistics to the people of Connecticut. In a day and age where transparency is a constant topic of discussion, I wanted to provide some facts from two recent, independent, credible polls released from Quinnipiac and Pew Research. Since this proposed legislation seems to take emotionally charged incidents from around the country and apply them to new legislation in Connecticut, I consider them extremely relevant. Both polls were centered around policing in America. Contrary to what you hear from the media and politicians, Americans support the police. 73% of Americans believe that funding for police should stay the same or increase. 77% of Americans approve of the way police officers are doing their job within their community. This is a higher approval rating than public schools, the presidency, Congress, churches, Supreme Court, banks, the medical system, newspapers, and television news - Gallup Poll research.

The media, along with opportunistic politicians, would have you believe that most Americans want to dismantle the way policing is conducted. This is a false narrative. It is clear from the polling that the overwhelming majority of Americans from across party lines, do not support dismantling the way policing is done.

According to the most recent Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2015, there were approximately 53 million police interactions with the public in the United States. According to the Washington Post's database on police deadly use of force incidents, in 2015, approximately 1,000 people were killed by law enforcement. That's .00188% of all interactions. Compare that number with the approximately 250,000 that died in 2014 due to medical error - John Hopkins research. In 2019, of the approximately 1,000 killed by law enforcement, approximately 96% had a weapon - Washington Post research. Every police related death is tragic, but to say it's a systemic problem is simply not true.

In 2019, CT State Police arrested 9,829 individuals. Of the 9,829 arrests, less than 1% resulted in a use of force incident (94 incidents). "About two-thirds or 66 percent of the 94 use-of-force incidents in 2019 involved individuals under the influence of alcohol, the report said. In addition, 25 of the incidents required the person to be sent to the hospital for a mental health evaluation."

“The use of deadly force by CT State Police was down from five incidents in 2017, to three in 2018 and two in 2019.” This information was obtained from the CT post.

In 2019, Trumbull Police had approximately 20,000 calls for service, and approximately 48 use of force incidents - this includes hand strikes, pepper spray, taser, and even drawing a weapon out of it's holster. That accounts for .25% of the entire call volume. This information is public and was obtained from the office of the Chief.

These are facts that cannot be disputed.

The areas of the bill most concerning to cops across this state are:

- qualified immunity
- the change of the use of force standard
- consent searches to motor vehicles
- language allowing POST to suspend officers for officers that “undermine public confidence”

Qualified Immunity:

Unfortunately, many people do not understand qualified immunity. I hear from many people that they believe qualified immunity means that police officers can do anything they want and not be held accountable. This is simply not true. It's the same qualified immunity given to politicians, town/state workers, firefighters, government workers, etc. It's to protect those doing their jobs correctly against frivolous lawsuits. Qualified immunity is, and has been, well established law by the Supreme Court. If this bill passes, cops will be afraid to do their jobs. No cop is going to put himself/herself in a situation that will cause him/her to lose his/her house, property or life savings. To say qualified immunity will help protect the “good officers”, is another false narrative.

Use of force:

When it comes to policing, Graham v Connor is the arguably the most important Supreme Court case of all. It shapes how we train, respond to calls, and how we use force when necessary. In my opinion, the change of this standard, along with qualified immunity, would effectively end law enforcement as we know it in the state of Connecticut.

Consent changes:

It is a known fact throughout the law enforcement community that most arrests are made on simple traffic stops. This includes drugs (like fentanyl which is killing thousands of people a year) and weapons (gun violence is plaguing our inner cities). Did you know that Timothy McVeigh was caught, after the Oklahoma City bombing, on a simple traffic stop? Not to mention that consent searches are already well established by search and seizure law under the 4th amendment. Also, long standing and established law has been set by the Supreme Court.

POST changes:

I believe police officers are already held to the highest standard. We have been told by other states that Connecticut produces some of the most well trained police officers in the country. After internal investigations, the bad apples are referred to POST anyway, and are ultimately fired/removed from law enforcement. Police officers still deserve due process, which is a right to all citizens.

To put things into perspective, and as stated best by Sheriff David Clarke:

“Working as a police officer, I have met a lot of cops of every race, ethnicity and background. Cops are not perfect. They don’t have to be perfect, they have to be excellent. Most cops reach excellence every single day, and often under very difficult circumstances - circumstances you can’t imagine, and wouldn’t want to if you could. Perfection is an unattainable goal. Cops are ordinary human beings. Like everyone else, cops make mistakes, but no profession works harder to correct its mistakes. Today police are more professional, better educated, and better trained than any time in their history.

Here’s a useful tip - if you want to avoid a bad outcome with a police officer, follow this simple rule. When a cop gives you a lawful command, OBEY IT, even if you disagree. Whatever problem you are experiencing is not going to be settled on the street. People with complaints need to use the process established for that purpose. Though cops don’t have the final say, they do in that moment. The idea that a law abiding citizen has to fear the police is a terrible and destructive lie.

Why is it that the people who protect you from the bad guys, are the subject of distrust and anger? All this is taking its toll on cops, and even more tragically, on the law abiding citizens in the neighborhoods that most need a strong police presence. The murder rates in these neighborhoods are going up because lawful, aggressive policing is going down. It’s called the Ferguson Effect, it’s real and it’s common sense. Why, police officers reason, put your career at risk if 30 seconds of smart phone video, taken out of context, can destroy you? Police officers aren’t afraid of patrolling the streets or being shot by random criminals. They’re afraid of being involved in an incident that would label them forever, as trigger happy racists.

Are there bad cops, of course there are. I’ve worked with a few of them. The overwhelming majority are good, decent, men and women concerned about the law abiding citizens in the communities they serve, and are willing to risk their lives on the line to protect them. Those who try to convince you, either out of ignorance or out of some ideological agenda, that the police are the enemy, those are the people you should fear. Run from them, not the cops.”

There is no police officer in Connecticut that will argue that what happened in Minneapolis was right. What that officer did was wrong and justice was served. However, to paint every police officer in Connecticut with the same brush is not right, and unfortunately, that is what this bill does. There is simply no data, facts or statistics that show police officers use excessive force,

are racist, or are not held accountable. The narrative that cops are hurting, injuring, or killing people at astronomical rates is simply not true. To hear the media, day in and day out, label cops as murderers and racists, is one of the most disturbing things I've ever seen. This onslaught of law enforcement has to stop.

If passed, this bill will have arguably the most restrictive language, in the country, against police officers. The bill will ultimately prevent good officers, the 99.99% of us, from doing our jobs and doing it well. It will have the opposite effect of its good intentions. In my opinion and based on what I know, Connecticut will experience the same crime wave seen happening across most major cities in America.

We acknowledge and welcome reasonable changes to law enforcement. We acknowledge that we are human and make mistakes. We acknowledge that there are bad apples in our profession, just like any other profession. We need more training, the best qualified candidates, and the rights tools to do the job - not radical reform bills.

We as law enforcement officers are always open to a discussion about change and how to better serve the community. The 99.99% of law abiding citizens and their communities will be affected negatively by this bill. I'm ultimately asking the Judiciary Committee to re-evaluate this bill in order to discuss making more reasonable changes. Changes need to be based on facts/statistics, open discussion, and not emotion. This bill may not defund the police, but it will dismantle the police.

Lastly, I want to thank the majority of people in Connecticut for speaking on behalf of the hardworking men and women of law enforcement, who put their lives on the line everyday to serve you and your families. Please don't believe the false narratives being spread by some, believe the facts.

Respectfully,

Kyle Lavin
Milford Resident